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Trade Policy Monitoring

Vision for Global Food Security, Technology, and Environmental Impact of Agriculture

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Report Highlights:

For the first time since the Second World War, and in a move that demonstrates leadership from an EU Member State, the UK government has launched a national food policy. The strategy is forward-thinking in direction, global in context, and champions trade over national protectionism. The policy document *"Food Matters – Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century"* reflects the sophistication and maturity of the UK market. From a privileged position in terms of wealth, education and market diversity, the UK is increasingly focused on the origin and pedigree of its food supply. The UK aims to demonstrate global leadership on the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions in the food chain, free and fair trade, public sector approaches to diet and health, and the pursuit of new technologies that will assist food security, including agricultural biotechnology applications.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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BACKGROUND

Against a back-drop of increasing consumer interest in food policy issues and rising global commodity prices, Prime Minister Gordon Brown commissioned a food strategy review in September 2007. The aims of the study were:

- to review the main trends in food production and consumption in the UK
- to analyze the implications of those trends for the economy, society and the environment
- to assess the robustness of the current policy framework for food
- to determine what the objectives of future food strategy should be and the measures needed to achieve them

The final report was published on July 7, 2008, and is entitled:

[Food Matters – Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century.](#)

KEY CONCLUSIONS

The UK government's vision for the food system is one that is more sustainable – economically, socially and environmentally.

The report recommends that the UK government's strategic policy objectives should be to secure:

- fair prices, choice, access to food and food security through open and competitive markets
- continuous improvement in the safety of food
- the changes needed to deliver a further transition to healthier diets
- a more environmentally sustainable food chain

SPECIFIC POINTS

The following points made in this report demonstrate the direction of UK government thinking on:

Biotech

- Changes in world animal feed markets, together with EU rules on importing genetically modified crops will create problems for the UK's regulatory system for food, and for the economics of food production.
- The UK's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) will publish an analysis of the potential impacts on the UK livestock sector of global trends in GM crop production. The report is due December 2008.
- The UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) will publish an analysis of the extent to which changes in the market are putting a strain on the regulatory system for GM products (including animal feed) and the implications for UK consumers. The report is due December 2008.

Food security

- The UK will continue to work to reduce distortions in agricultural trade, and to raise agricultural productivity in the developing world.
- The UK is about 60 percent self-sufficient in food. Of total imports, 68 percent comes from other EU countries.

- Attempting to pursue a national food security in isolation from the global context is unlikely to be practical, sustainable or financially rational, not least because key inputs (such as energy, feed and fertilizer) are sourced globally.
- Recent rises in food commodity prices require a concerted international response.
- Well-functioning, competitive markets should provide fair prices for consumers and a fair deal throughout the supply chain.
- A debate on how to ensure a secure and sustainable supply of food in the future was launched on July 17, 2008, by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. The results of this discussion paper will feed into a more detailed food security policy statement expected from the UK government in late 2008.

Environment

- The Chief Scientific Adviser will commission a major new study to examine how the global food system needs to evolve in a world adapting to, and mitigating, climate change.
- Around 18 percent of UK greenhouse gas emissions are related to food production and consumption, and nearly half of these emissions come from farms.
- On-farm greenhouse gas emissions will become a focus in the years ahead.
- The UK government has commissioned research on developing a system for calculating on-farm greenhouse gas emissions to be able to recognize and reward reductions.
- The UK government will continue its leadership role on climate change in Europe by promoting the part that agriculture has to play in both the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

Food waste

- The UK needs a packaging waste management system that does more to encourage prevention of packaging waste.
- UK consumers spend an average of .420 (\$840) per household each year on food that they then throw away.
- The government will work with industry to set a target for substantial cuts in food waste in homes and business by 2012 and continue to support consumer campaigns.

Health

- Better information and advice for consumers is needed regarding the impact of diet on health.
- Expanding the Department of Health's '5-a-day' campaign to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption is a priority.
- Restaurants and other 'eating out' venues should be encouraged to make it easier for consumers to make healthy choices.

Food safety

- Public confidence in food has increased in recent years following the problems of the past, such as the BSE outbreak in cattle.
- Microbiological contamination of meat supply chains is a continuing challenge, as is the threat of diseases transferring to humans from animals and poultry.
- Vigilance is needed to reduce the risk of food contamination, particularly in respect of food imported from outside the EU.

The Future

- The Prime Minister has asked the Cabinet Office to establish and support a cross-government Food Strategy Task Force to monitor ongoing developments in the food system and food markets, and to drive forward implementation of the recommended actions outlined in this report.
- Sub-groups of the Task Force will take forward individual key actions, each chaired by a lead department. The Task Force will report annually to the Prime Minister and the reports will be published.

ANALYSIS

The UK government has already accepted all of the recommendations detailed in Food Matters – Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century, and there has been a plethora of Ministerial announcements to communicate the direction of key subject areas addressed within the report.

Three UK government departments have been tasked with working together to deliver the objectives outlined within the report (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Food Standards Agency and Department of Health). However, the report encourages all points in the food chain, from farmer through to consumer, to take responsibility for improving health and food safety, and for protecting the environment.

As a result of this report, and the future food policy direction that it dictates, the UK can be expected to:

- Look globally, not nationally, for answers on food security
- Support reform of the EU approval process for agricultural biotechnology events
- Work environmentally sustainable practices into every facet of agricultural policy
- Focus on the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions involved in food production
- Require food manufacturers to pay particular attention to information on food labels
- Require food manufacturers to consider the type and amount of material used in food packaging